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IMMORTELLS

AND

OTHER POEMS.

BY

WASHINGTON VAN DUSEN.



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IMMORTELLES AND OTHER POEMS.

IMMORTELLES.

O MODEST flower! recall the grace
Of one who loved and gathered thee;
For thou art now the only trace
That brings her memory back to me.

The immortelles all withered lie
That once, like snow-flakes, charmed my gaze;
The only flowers that never die
Are memories of happy days.

Alas! so changed with years we grow,—
So soon are bloom and beauty o'er,—
We might pass by and never know
The face that haunted us of yore.

Life's river hurries on each hour,
And turns to new scenes evermore;
And leaves behind some cherished flower,
To fade on Time's receding shore.

Time, take these crumbled flowers and sever
The last endearing charm from me ;
But in my heart, oh, leave forever
The immortelles of memory !

THE UNDERTOW.

WE gaze upon the sunlit sea,
But cannot scan the depths below,
Nor dream how strong its pulse may be,
Until we feel its undertow.

We may know well a sunny face,
But not the silent tide below ;
The inner grace we cannot trace,
We know not what the undertow.

Our life is more than we yet see ;
There still are greater depths to know ;
The surface beautiful may be,
But grander is the undertow.

We cannot fathom all the strife,
 The mysteries that round us flow;
 We only have a faith in life,
 We only feel the undertow.

DRIFTING.

GENTLY flows the peaceful river,
 Smiling with the sunny day,
 While my little boat is drifting
 Calmly on its idle way.

Many hurry by me swiftly,—
 Some in pity, some in pride;
 While adown the placid waters
 I go drifting with the tide.

Time enough when rapids near me,
 Or breakers dash my barque aside,
 To seize the oars and bravely
 Through the foaming torrent ride.

But why now mar this rest so tranquil,
Why forget this joyous day,
Leaving flowery banks, though narrow,
Urging for the broader way?

Let me check my course a moment,
Let me drift awhile and dream;
Ah! my boat may glide so slowly,
Yet too soon be down the stream!

Careless of the shores beyond me,
What shoals, what tempests, I must bide;
Knowing that the stream must bear me,
And I cannot change the tide.

Let me, like some trustful swimmer,
Resting on the salty brine,
With my eyes upon the heavens,
Calmly on life's wave recline;

Till a hush falls on the waters,
And a calm breathes from the skies,
As the western sun, descending,
Gilds the day that slowly dies;

And the great Sea spreads before me,
While its fading heavens wide,
Calmly shed a parting glory
In the golden eventide.

HER MISSION.

SHE drew no form with matchless skill,
She carved no sculptured bust of stone,
She sang no song fame's voice to fill,
Nor swept the keys with thrilling tone;

But cast herself in finer mould :
She finely touched the hearts of men
To see the flower of truth unfold,
And bloom on earthly soil again.

She came the passing crowd among,—
It seemed to breathe diviner air ;
Her smile disarmed the idler's tongue,
Who turned and blessed her with a prayer.

Reflecting heaven in her face,
Men gazed and took new heart the while :
Sorrow owned her kindly grace,
And Envy dropped its frown to smile.

What matter that no special task
Was hers amid the earthly strife ?
She gave earth all that Heaven could ask :
Her presence was the bread of life.

THE TWO SONGS.

THE sea was calm, the waves, with muffled roar,
Sang dirges in an undertone :
But time, unmoved, lay on the drowsy shore.
Nor cared to hear the surges moan.

Like words that softly breathe a fond desire,
But fail the heart's great depths to reach.
Wave after wave sang, only to retire
Unheeded from the tranquil beach.

But ere the setting sun sank to repose
A gale swept o'er the swelling sea,
And mountain high the crested breakers rose
And sang their grandest melody!

And Time now brightened with the foaming surge,
And heard with thrilling pulse once more
The long-resounding breaker's song and dirge
That rang upon the wild, wild shore!

So, thrilling words and melodies sublime
Roll from the flood of years passed o'er;
Borne like a surge upon the shores of time,
To ring in memory evermore!

ONCE A FRIEND, A FRIEND FOR-
EVER.

ONCE thou wert happy by my side,
Now oceans roll our path between,
And fate has sundered far and wide
The hope, the love that might have been.

Still, something lives time cannot sever,
And from its volume, old and gray,—
Remembering a happier day,—
I turn the faded leaves and say,
Once a friend, a friend forever.

Bound with my life inseparable
Are happy days once spent with you;
And though the loss be now irreparable,
And friendships old give place to new,
Why should a careless word dis sever
The sweet remembrance of the true?
No, no! my heart still follows you,
Where'er you roam 'neath Heaven's blue;
Once my friend, my friend forever!

Your picture hangs upon the wall
Just as of old, and fair to view;
So, through time's flight and changes all,
Lives something still unchanged to you.
Live with my past! may memory never
Lose all the bloom and save the thorn,
Nor from divided heart be torn
The flower of friendship, which, once worn,
May leave its fragrance there forever.

SEA DREAMS.

'Tis a beautiful day, and the ships far away
Sail over the sea till they vanish from me;
And the waves seem to say, Oh, dream while
you may,
While the springtide of youth overflows like
the sea.

Some one by my side is watching the tide
And the white-caps that roll from the far-
away blue;
In sweet silence I bide, while the glad moments
glide,
And love breathes a dream that hope would
prove true.

Ah, so sweet here to rest, with the one I love
best,
While the surges roll high and the cool
breezes blow;
Till the orb in the west sinks slowly to rest,
And sheds its sweet calm on the waters below.

Life flows on complete like the day full and
sweet ;

Joy swells every shore of being's strange sea ;
And but comes one regret, that the day now
to set

Must so soon with its beauty vanish from me.

Oh, beautiful day, how fain would I stay
The lingering rays on thy gold-gleaming
shore !

But the hours speed away like the waves that
to-day

Roll from their depths to return nevermore.

A SONG OF LOVE.

SHE swept the sweet chords with a tremulous tone,
And thrilled all my soul with the strain,
As it rose with the promise of infinite bliss,
And sighed out its burden of pain.

“Forever,” she sang, “the heart, like the sea,—
Breathing a song that will never be stilled,—
Restlessly yearns for a love not to be,
With a longing that will never be filled.

“Oh, love, why do you come with a rapturous
kiss,
And wound me with promises vain?
Why, with the key-note of infinite bliss,
Comes the burden of infinite pain?”

WINTER'S ROSES.

Lo! a window filled with roses
Beams upon the snow-clad street;
And my eye with joy reposes
On the loveliness I meet;
Whilst the wintry breezes blow,
And around me falls the snow.

But what roses charm my gaze
With an ever-hardy bloom,
Cheer the streets on cheerless days,
Sending sunshine through the gloom!
Whilst the wintry winds that blow
Give their cheeks a rosier glow.

O sweet roses, in your prime,
Cherish youth before it's past!
Wait not till the touch of time
Robs you of your bloom at last;
Shed your fragrance now upon
Friends who live when beauty's gone!

IN THE GARDEN OF GOD.

I TRAMPLED down a little flower
One day, in idle sport and mirth;
But its ashes held a secret power,—
Another bloomed and blessed the earth.

I cast aside a heavy stone,
But knew not then the ore I rolled ;
And cursed the dust, as I walked alone,
Unconscious of its hidden gold.

I shouted on the evening breeze,—
I marred the calm and sacred air ;
It breathed in cadence through the trees,
And held me captive unaware.

Truth came to me with air divine,
But I mocked her form and features fine ;
Till her face, transfigured in the light,
Assumed new splendor in my sight.

I saw the Keeper, and He said,
Go where you like, do what you will ;
The truth will hover o'er your head,
The earth will bloom in beauty still.

SONG.

O LOVELY spirit, form divine !
Though I may never see
Thy face by day, I'll not repine
If night brings dreams of thee.

Like some sweet song, some far-off swell
That charms a moment rare,
Thy phantom presence throws its spell,
And melts upon the air.

Then lovely spirit, form divine,
Still disembodied be ;
Day mars the heart that would be thine ;
Come in my dreams to me.

THE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS.

THE shades of night fall on my way,
And darkness holds its gloomy sway,
While spectres strange my vision greet,
And graves lie open at my feet;
The chilling winds against my face
Enfold me in their cold embrace;
Doubt and despair close at my heel,—
What hope, what pleasure can I feel,
While through this tangled maze alone
I tread my way with heart of stone?

A gentle voice falls on my ear,—
Love cries, "Take heart, for I am here!
I am the sun that lights the soul,—
Earth's central fire that warms the whole;
I keep the life that heaven instils
Firm as the everlasting hills:
The sun, the warmth, the light, the fire,
I give the zest to all desire.
Come, take my hand, and thou shalt see
That heaven itself must lean on me."

A LESSON FROM THE BROOK.

A BROOK ran merrily down the mountain-side,
As free and careless as a wayward child,
Until a rock debarred its rushing tide
And backward hurled its restless waters wild.

But still the brook pursued its winding way,
And only paused to shed a passing foam,
As on the stubborn rock it dashed its spray,
And hurried swiftly from its mountain home.

And still, unmindful in its idle bed,
The rock slept on through centuries untold,
Whilst evermore upon its helpless head
The sandy torrent and the pebbles rolled.

The years have passed; and now those waters
flow
In silence o'er the head of fallen pride;
For on the sands the wave-worn rock lies low,—
A remnant 'neath the ever-moving tide!

So lowly merit carves its rugged way,
And passes o'er each barrier of time ;
So patience smooths the road, day after day,
Till silent perseverance grows sublime.

LONGING.

LIKE a restless sea, whose surges
Would kiss the vaulted skies,
My longing heart leaps upward
Only to fall with baffled cries.

Yearning with restless endeavor
And hopes alluring and vain,
Soaring with passion to heaven,
And falling in passionate pain.

Streams of life pouring within me
Like the rivers that run to the sea ;
Still, like the sea, yearning, unsated,
Unrest takes possession of me.

Oh, love, come with thy fulness of spirit
Filling the void existing in me,
Till my life, like a wave universal,
Laps every shore of life's infinite sea.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

STAND not on the banks bewailing
That the stream flows not thy way;
All thy grief is unavailing,—
This is the tide that serves to-day.

“Nay, the current stern defying,
Still the waters roar and rage;
Give us back the faith undying
Of our fathers' golden age.”

Vain thy backward stroke and struggle,
While the tide, resisting thee,
Casts its spray and breaks the bubble,
And every drop will reach the sea.

“Nay, but Error’s shoal’s ahead;
And, where lights that once beamed true,
Beacons strange now shine instead,
And truth is lost to view.”

Nay, this is the stream of truth,
And its current evermore
Sweeps aside and leaves in rush
Error’s driftwood on the shore.

Then, sweep onward, mighty river,
With thy good and evil powers;
Lo! thy course is from the Giver,
And in higher hands than ours.

THE CUP OF LIFE.

A COOLING drink may quench the thirst,
A night of slumber rest the brain,
A little food may hunger still,
A balm may ease the throb of pain.

But who drinks life's cup will ne'er be full,
Nor can the baffled thought find rest;
The longing heart will ne'er cease to crave,
Nor the mind be eased of its endless quest.

VOICES OF NATURE.

COME, though fortune close her gates to thee,
And fame refuse thy proffered name obscure;
Come where the portals swing forever free,
And mansions rise whose beauty shall endure.

The forest monarchs,—pillars of a race
That wreathe with green the vault of heaven's
blue,—
From heights serene, breathe down a quiet grace:
A sigh, a song, perhaps a word for you.

By roaring cataract and silent dell,
By rocky gorge and tuneful ocean's strand,
There voices breathe what volumes cannot tell,
There is the wealth cast by the Master's hand!

No lowly flower that you pass heedless by,
No moaning pine nor merry bird that sings,
But woos your yearning heart's despondency
And courts the slumbering love of purer
things.

And yet his glowing touch unheeded dies,
His music falls unheard on drowsy ears;
The tuneless chords within give no replies,
Like slackened strings unmoved by joy or
tears.

Then sing, strange voices by the sounding shore,
Where ocean's heaving surge is ceaseless
strewn,—
Roll out in mournful dirges evermore
That something in man's life is out of tune!

AFTER THE STORM.

COLD, cold, and desolate the bleak earth lies,
And the sea grows dark while the sullen skies
 Outpour
Their watery floods, and the wild winds urge
The maddened sea with its foaming surge
 To the shore.

And my heart grows weary with the sad refrain
Of the dying waves repeating one strain
 O'er and o'er.
But a cheering gleam illumines the west,
And behold, on the billows far-off crest
 Sunbeams pour !

Then, crowning all the glorious view,
The bow of Heaven spans the skies clear blue
 As of yore ;
And brighter rolls the crested surge,
But changeless rings the song and dirge
 On the shore.

So life, like a wave, in sunshine or rain,
Is borne from the depths of the limitless main
 To the shore ;
And its mists may veil Heaven, yet hold to our
 eyes
The bright arch of hope on the eternal skies
 Evermore.

ESTRANGED.

HER heart has changed, while mine, the same,
Is constant as the yearning sea,
Yet sinks to watch the dying flame
 That cheered and warmed the heart of me.

Love was the bond between us twain,
And love possessed the magic key ;
But some link in the golden chain
 Has parted life and love for me.

I censure not the heart estranged,—
Love may be firm, but must be free;
I only sigh to think when changed,
She changed,—she changed the world for me!

"ALL'S WELL!"

Lo! I walk beside the river,
While the stars shine in the sky,
And the moonbeams gently quiver
On the waters flowing by.

And the great ships lie before me,
Calmly sleeping on the tide;
And a peacefulness comes o'er me
That I wish would long abide.

Hark! far o'er the waters stealing,
Faintly sounds a distant bell,
And a voice stirs all my feeling
As it answers back, "All's well!"

And the peace of nature fills me,
And the chords within that swell
Echo, whilst that greeting thrills me,
Heaven's watchword,—“All is well!”

NEGLECTED.

A VIOLET by the roadside grew
Unnoticed and alone,
Among the wild flowers basking there,
Beside a mossy stone.

What hurt it that the passers-by
No kindly glances threw,
Still smiled the sun, and from the sky
Still came the freshening dew.

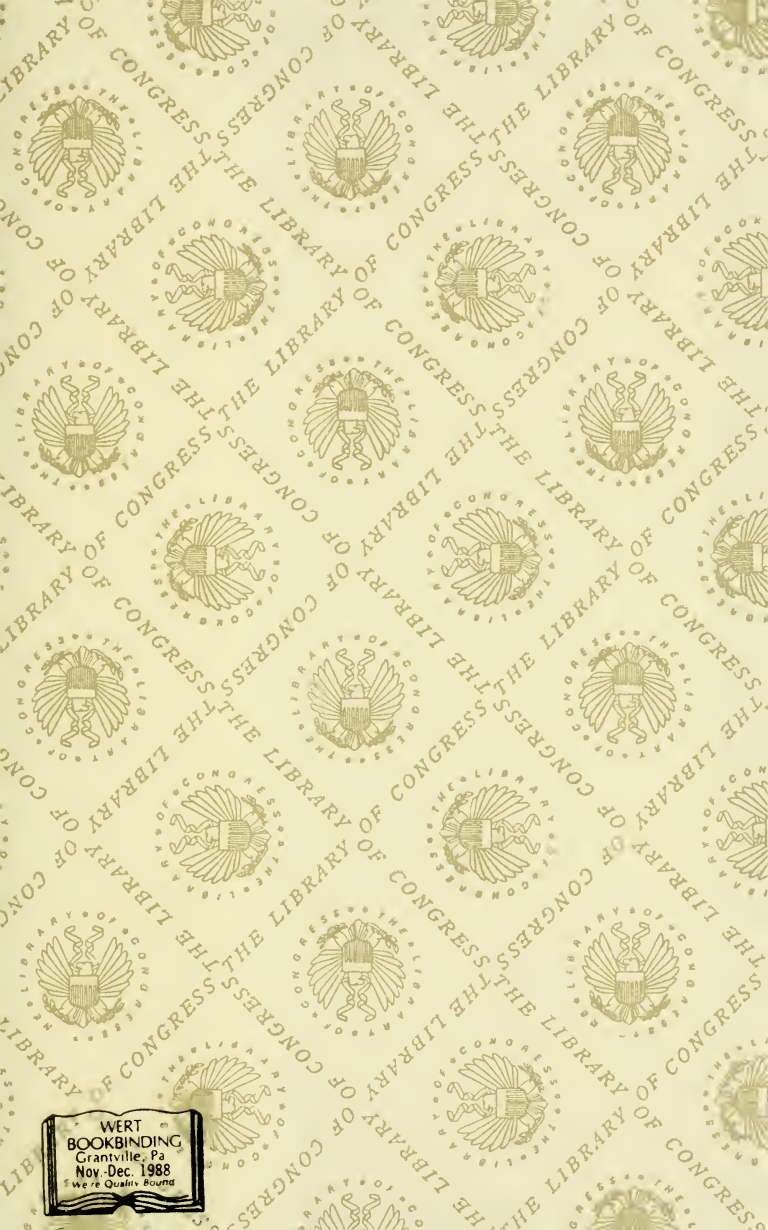
So, scorned by pride of place or birth,
The truth may lowly lie,
Yet feel the warmth born not of earth,
And let the world pass by.

THE COMMON BOND.

YOU may soar to heights elysian,
And think beyond the common ken,
But the lowly crowd has claims on you
To be a man among men.

Dream of a life without the world,
But know the bond that binds you when
You kindly take each proffered hand,
And be a man among men.





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